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Id, Ego and Super Ego in Kathy.H's Personality in Kazuo Ishiguro's 'Never Let Me Go'

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores aspects of personality theory—specifically the id, ego, and superego—and examines how these constructs relate to Etsuko's personality and life. Sigmund Freud, a founding figure in psychoanalysis, famously stated, "Where id is, there shall ego be." His model posits a tripartite psyche composed of the id, ego, and superego, which function not in isolation but in constant interaction. Clarifying these abstract dimensions is essential; though invisible and intangible, they can be inferred from human thoughts, behavior patterns, and motivations. Carl Jung was also associated with psychoanalytic discourse, albeit with a different interpretation. For Jung, the ego serves as the center of consciousness—housing our awareness and sustaining our sense of self. It organizes our thoughts, intuitions, feelings, and sensations, accessing unrepressed memories. The ego functions as the bearer of personality, mediating between the internal psyche and the external world. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* unfolds within a dystopian society where human clones are produced to provide organ donations once they reach young adulthood. Narrated in flashback, the story follows Kathy, now thirty-one and on the cusp of her first donation, who has spent the past eleven years working as a carer for fellow clones awaiting their fate. Kathy reflects

on her time at Hailsham, and through her interior monologue Ishiguro delves into the characters' psychological depths—uncovering dormant emotions and hidden desires. He is particularly interested in how these characters use therapeutic mechanisms—such as dreams, fantasy, and transference—to cope with their painful memories, concepts originally introduced by Freud.

Introduction:

According to Kihlstrom (1997), "There is no evidence for the existence of repression and there are a number of people who were exposed to traumatic experiences during war, but they can remember the event very well." [1]

Dr. Freud introduced the tripartite model of the psyche—comprising the id, ego, and superego—which he viewed as deeply interconnected rather than isolated components. These constructs are inherently abstract: invisible and intangible, yet their presence can be deduced through human thoughts, behavioral patterns, and motivated actions. Freud famously likened the mind to an iceberg: the conscious mind forms just the tip visible above the water, while the preconscious lies just below the surface, and the unconscious remains submerged in the depths. The conscious level corresponds to immediate perception and awareness. The preconscious holds memories and information not in current awareness but readily accessible. The unconscious—comprising the vast majority of the iceberg—contains repressed desires and drives that significantly influence behavior, even though they cannot be directly observed. As with icebergs, around ninety percent of the mind lies beneath the surface, beyond direct view.

The id represents the primal, instinctual urges that compel individuals to pursue pleasure. Governed by the pleasure principle, it drives the most basic human desires, serving as the core motivator of human behavior. The id embodies the wildest, most unrestrained and animalistic facet of the human psyche, acting as the reservoir of energy that fuels both the ego and superego. It seeks to fulfill all desires, ranging from basic needs to sexual impulses. The id also harbors aggressive instincts, making it the source of the two most influential forces in human behavior: sex and aggression. Operating without regard for time, place, societal norms, morality, or ethics, the id demands immediate satisfaction of all emerging needs. It functions solely to minimize internal tension through instant gratification, driven by primal, irrational, and fantasy-based impulses. The id focuses on satisfying biological urges as they arise, with no concern for external reality, aiming only to avoid pain and maximize pleasure.

Christopher Henke (2003) also discusses Ishiguro's narrative unreliability. He describes Ishiguro's novels as taking the form of autobiographical memory. When the characters recall their memories, the reader should remember that their stories and memories are not always directly related to their past experiences. They are more likely to have inner stories or inner personalities—a reflection of their present needs or their repressed wishes. Henke also claims that this kind of story "undergoes continual rewriting and editing and entails a continual self-creation of the ego."[2]

The ego is the component of the mind responsible for rationalizing and managing thoughts and behaviors, particularly in relation to the external world. Guided by the reality principle, it advocates delaying gratification until the appropriate moment, ensuring that actions align with societal norms. The ego emerges from the id between six and eight months of age, enabling individuals to navigate life's realities effectively. It regulates and tempers the id's demands based on practical possibilities for satisfaction, rooted in logical and realistic thinking. The ego, alongside the id and superego, ensures the smooth functioning of human behavior across these three psychological layers. When these layers are misaligned, individuals may experience psychological imbalances, leading to abnormal behaviors. The ego constantly mediates between the id's impulsive desires and the superego's moral constraints, striving to maintain equilibrium. It selectively responds to environmental demands, controlling the expression of the id's urges while engaging in a continuous struggle for self-preservation. The subconscious, accessible when needed, stores memories and experiences that can be readily recalled, such as past events or familiar names. Meanwhile, the ego manages the ongoing conflict between the unconscious, which seeks expression, and the conscious mind, which acts as a gatekeeper.

Regarding the huge influence of Freud, the comment by W.H. Auden appears to be perfectly apt; "If often he was wrong and, at times absurd, to us is no more a person now but a whole climate of opinion under whom we conduct our different lives…."[3]

One of Freud's most debated theories, the tripartite structure, is reflected in many works by creative writers, addressing a fundamental aspect of human psychology. Carl Jung links all of humanity through the concept of the "collective unconscious," a shared reservoir of primordial experiences that unites the human race. In his introduction to Four Archetypes (1972), Jung explains that the personal unconscious lies above a deeper, innate layer known as the collective unconscious. He chose the term "collective" because this part of the psyche is universal, not individual, containing consistent patterns and behaviors across all people. This universal psychic foundation exists in everyone. Archetypal criticism examines

symbols and patterns that give structure to artistic works. Jung suggests that neuroses arise when individuals fail to confront or accept certain archetypal elements within their unconscious. His theory of individuation involves specific archetypes and focuses on a process of self-awareness, unlike Freudian criticism, which analyzes individual personality and explains neuroses through sexual conflicts. Jung believed that human consciousness has developed slowly and remains incomplete, with vast areas of the mind still unexplored. He divides the psyche into three parts: the ego, which represents the conscious mind; the personal unconscious, encompassing memories that are easily recalled or suppressed; and the collective unconscious, a unique aspect of his theory. The collective unconscious is a shared "psychic inheritance," a repository of humanity's collective experiences that we are born with but cannot directly access. It shapes our behaviors and emotions, particularly in profound ways, though we only perceive its influence indirectly. Certain experiences, such as the creative output of artists and musicians across cultures and eras, the spiritual insights of mystics, or the common themes in dreams, myths, fairy tales, and literature, vividly demonstrate the collective unconscious. A notable example is the near-death experience, where individuals from diverse backgrounds report strikingly similar memories after being revived from near-death encounters.

According to Freud in his book *"The Interpretation of Dream,* "Id is defined in terms of instinct theory as a mechanism concerned with how to create, organize, and energize instinctual needs."[4]

For Carl Jung, the psyche is a central concept, preferred over the term "mind," which typically refers to conscious mental processes in everyday language. Jung viewed the psyche as a self-regulating system that seeks balance between opposing traits while pursuing its own development. His model is best understood as a fixed metaphor. In Jung's framework, the ego serves as the core of conscious awareness, housing our sense of personal identity, organizing thoughts, intuitions, emotions, and sensory experiences, and accessing non-repressed memories. The ego acts as a bridge between the inner and outer worlds, shaped by an individual's attitude type: extroverts focus on the external world, while introverts prioritize the inner world. One cognitive function typically dominates in an individual, being more developed than others. The ego emerges from the self in early development and serves an executive role, not only ensuring survival but also enriching life. Jung likened consciousness to the eye, which focuses selectively, excluding irrelevant information. This excluded content sinks into the unconscious, creating a counterbalance to conscious focus. This dynamic generates tension, which eventually manifests in dreams or imagery as the unconscious compensates for or complements the conscious mind. The self, in

Jung's view, encompasses the entire psyche, including its full potential, and acts as the guiding force behind personality, enabling optimal adaptation at each life stage. The self's ultimate aim is wholeness, achieved through the process of individuation, a hallmark of Jungian psychology. Unlike other theories centered on the ego, Jung's perspective is rooted in the self and adopts a teleological approach, viewing the self as present from birth, grounded in biology yet connected to a vast array of experiences. The persona is a facet of personality formed for adaptation or convenience, derived from the Greek term for the masks worn by actors to represent specific roles. Often described as the ego's "public relations" agent, the persona is essential for daily interactions. Social success relies on a flexible persona that adapts to various contexts, but problems arise when individuals overly identify with it, such as when someone cannot shed their professional persona. The persona develops in childhood to meet the expectations of parents, teachers, and peers, embodying desirable traits while relegating undesirable ones to the shadow.

2. Theory of Personality in Kathy. H's Character:

Kazuo Ishiguro's dystopian novel Never Let Me Go, published in 2005, centers on three cloned characters—Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy—caught in a complex love triangle. Set in a fictional England, the story explores regenerative medicine, where clones are created to provide healthy organs for transplantation later in life. These clones, including Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy, are denied the full rights granted to non-cloned humans, existing on the margins of society. Kathy, the protagonist and narrator, reflects on her life, beginning with her memories of Hailsham School, a facility designed for parentless cloned children raised for the organ donation program. She describes the enigmatic existence of the school and its students, who are overseen by human figures like Madame, a mysterious French woman who collects the clones' artwork to display in a gallery, aiming to prove that clones possess souls. Madame actively supports the clones' treatment, while Miss Lucy, a beloved guardian, believes the clones should be informed about their role as organ donors. Miss Emily, the head guardian and leader of Hailsham, also champions human cloning. Kathy narrates the dynamics of the love triangle involving herself, Ruth, and Tommy. A compelling aspect of the novel is Kathy's journey as a clone, navigating her life until the time of her organ donation. By embracing her interests and affirming her chosen lifestyle, Kathy achieves a degree of autonomy, yet she grapples with existential questions about the nature of clones and humans toward the novel's end. Ishiguro's focus is not on explaining the cloning process but on arguing that clones, like humans, experience authentic emotions and undergo typical developmental stages, despite being unable to reproduce. The novel emphasizes that clones have souls capable of

feeling, aspiring, and shaping their lives. Through a Freudian lens—analyzing the Id, Ego, and Superego—the narratives of Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are examined to explore whether clones possess souls akin to humans and whether these souls reflect internal conflicts mirrored in the Id, Ego, and Superego

In her 2015 master's thesis, Piet explored the theme of care as a means of shaping one's ego, as exemplified by Kathy's character in Never Let Me Go. Care, a fundamental aspect of humanity, is embodied in Kathy's role as a "carer," where she is tasked with keeping organ donors calm to prevent distress. By providing care, Kathy delays the donors' deaths during their organ donation process. Piet argued that this deeply human act of care mitigates the harsh realities of the organ donation system, making it more bearable for donors. Kathy was not the only clone to take on the role of caregiver; other clones voluntarily chose this profession, underscoring their inherent humanity despite being genetically engineered. Another key element in the novel is the use of "art" or "creativity" as a tool to determine whether clones possess souls and can express emotions such as hope, love, despair, and fear. Clones were encouraged to create artwork to demonstrate their creativity and prove that they share human-like qualities.

Ruth creates her imaginary pets when she plays in the fields with Kathy:

> Ruth came a step closer. 'My *best* horse,' she said, 'is Thunder. I can't let you ride on *him*. He's much too dangerous. But you can ride Bramble, as long as you don't use your crop on him. Or if you like, you could have any of the others,' she reeled off several more names I don't know remember. [5]

In this scene, Kathy recalls Ruth asking her to engage in a game involving imaginary horses, which exist solely in Ruth's unconscious mind, or id. Kathy acknowledges that Ruth cannot truly own these horses, as clones are prohibited from possessing such things. The horses symbolize Ruth's yearning to claim ownership, a right denied to clones. At Hailsham, clones can only acquire possessions through structured activities like Sales and Exchanges, where all transactions are meticulously recorded, rendering true ownership and the freedom it entails unattainable. Owning a pet, such as a horse, is even further beyond the limited possessions available to clones. Through Ruth, Kathy voices the hypocrisy of Hailsham's institution, which strips its students of freedom and rights. This narrative also highlights Kathy's frustration with the rules enforced by the human staff at Hailsham, her longing to escape these

constraints, and her aspiration to assert leadership. In the imaginary horse-riding game, Kathy uses her role to reflect her broader reality: the lack of agency and ownership in her life. By allowing Ruth to embrace the fantasy of owning and skillfully riding horses, Kathy expresses her own desire to transcend the limitations imposed on clones. Additionally, Kathy's narrative reveals her diminished self-esteem as a clone, stemming from the occasional revulsion she perceives from the staff, who view clones as unsettling or repulsive beings. In Kathy's ego, she first recognizes human revulsion when she and her friends first meet Madame Marie-Claude and witness her unpleasant response:

> And I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her. And though we just kept on walking, we all felt it; it was like we'd walked from the sun right into chilly shade. Ruth had been right: Madame *was* afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. We hadn't been ready for that. It had never occurred to us to wonder how *we* would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders. [6]

Freud emphasized the significance of identity in a person's life, arguing that the loss of an object or attachment triggers a melancholic process that shapes self-development and ego formation, a key aspect of individual growth. He noted that self-identity and personal development are influenced by others in various ways. Jantini analyzed Kathy's emotional landscape, suggesting that her superego suppressed her emotional expression, possibly due to her life's circumstances. Kathy's id and ego were overshadowed by her superego, leading her to accept her fate without rage or rebellion. In contrast, Vinduska, in his thesis Points of Perception: Possible Readings of Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go, applied Freud's psychoanalytic framework to explore the role of humor in the novel. He observed that even jokes in Never Let Me Go reflected the clones' predetermined fates. For instance, Tommy was mocked by the football team for being chosen last, prompting an outburst of anger through tantrums and shouting. Ruth suggested the teasing was planned, but Tommy failed to recognize it as a joke. Vinduska argued that Tommy's superego and the guardians made him aware of the jest, contrary to Ruth's belief that he was oblivious. Kathy, as the narrator, often focused more on her past than on immediate events. In the novel's opening, she is depicted as more absorbed in her memories than in her surroundings. Similarly, when Kathy saw Ruth holding Tommy's hand, she was emotionally overwhelmed and unable to focus on the announcement of Miss Lucy's replacement at Hailsham. To cope, Kathy prioritized her emotions and chose the role of a carer to avoid dwelling on Ruth and Tommy's relationship. These events demonstrate

Kathy's ability to manage her emotions effectively, with her superego overpowering her id and ego. Far from being suppressed, Kathy's emotional side was carefully controlled, and she found satisfaction in her superego, enjoying her role as a carer traveling between hospitals. For Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, their past at Hailsham held profound significance as their only sense of origin and belonging, unlike the "originals" for whom it meant little. Kathy expressed regret over the rift that developed between her, Ruth, and Tommy, lamenting her lack of awareness that led to their separation. She believed that had she understood the situation, she might have acted to keep them united, but the incomprehensible nature of her existence as a clone robbed her of the ability to devise a defensive strategy.

Freud explains that our self-defence mechanism tries its best to prevent us from remembering anything considered undesirable, unbearable, or traumatic by keeping it away from our conscious. However, in *"Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through"* (1914), Freud argues that the undesirable memories are not totally hidden in our unconscious. At times, these memories slip out of our unconscious and express themselves in the form of repetition. Freud explains that "the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it." [7] However, when these memories manifest themselves repeatedly, they do not exhibit themselves as they really are, but in their transference. The process of transference is possible because "the ideal remembering of what has been forgotten, which occurs in hypnosis, corresponds to a state in which resistance has been completely put to one side."[8]

Ruth's thoughts, actions, and behaviors can be better understood through the lens of Freud's Id, the disorganized part of the psyche driven by instinctual urges. The Id seeks immediate gratification of desires without regard for reality. In Ruth's case, Freud's pleasure principle dominates, overshadowing external realities. The Id's primary drives—libido and aggression—are evident in Ruth's character. Her jealousy and fear of abandonment lead her to keep Tommy away from Kathy, prioritizing her own desires. This jealousy, rooted in the pleasure principle, blinds Ruth to the harm she causes Kathy, Tommy, and herself. She pursues a physical relationship with Tommy, believing it will forge a lasting bond, but both eventually recognize that physical intimacy cannot replace the genuine love between Tommy and Kathy. Ruth later confesses her mistake, seeking forgiveness for separating them. Her jealousy, ego, rage, libidinal desires, and overall behavior demonstrate her humanity. Ultimately, her superego—her conscience—prevails, leading her to sacrifice her ego in atonement. Ruth exhibits a full

range of human emotions, and her eventual admission of wrongdoing shows that her conscience continually troubled her for keeping Tommy and Kathy apart.

Kathy's superego reveals how the fabricated narrative she absorbs at Hailsham diminishes her sense of self as a clone. She is taught that her "indecent" origins confine her to a lower-class status, akin to a second-class citizen, outlaw, or criminal. Behaviors that treat her as worthless or disposable are normalized and accepted. Kathy also learns that a clone's life differs fundamentally from a human's due to their distinct purposes. Clones are raised at Hailsham to become organ donors, their existence likened to farm animals bred for slaughter. Despite campaigns advocating for humane treatment of animals, humans ultimately view these animals as resources for food, showing little regard for their lives. Similarly, Kathy's reflections on Hailsham suggest her life parallels that of these animals—she is provided with good conditions solely to serve as an organ donor, raised to be sacrificed. Furthermore, Kathy understands that a clone's death, termed "completion" at Hailsham, differs from human death. Humans believe their immortal souls ascend to God, making death less final and frightening. In contrast, the superego's concept of death for clones assumes they lack immortal souls, rendering their death a definitive end, or "completion," with no possibility of an afterlife.

Ernst Jentsch (1906) explains that feelings of fright may develop only when these familiar things lead to intellectual uncertainty. In 1919, Freud developed quite different ideas about the uncanny. He identifies the uncanny as the state resulting from the repetition of the same thing, but for him, fright is not caused by one's uncertainty. To illustrate his idea, he goes back to the meaning of the German words – *heimlich* and "*unheimlich"* again and claims that the term "frightening" or "*unheimlich*" "applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open". [9] This excerpt not only shows humans' superiority and their desire to place clones in the inferior position, but also implies the factor obstructing Kathy in developing a healthy identity as a clone. "The uncanny would always be an area in which a person was unsure of his way around, and the better oriented he was in the world around him, the less likely he would be to find the objects and occurrences in it uncanny". [10]

As well as the memories of Hailsham concerning the institution's activities and staff, the rumours about clones spreading in Hailsham contribute to Kathy's low self-esteem. When Kathy lives in the institution, she learns that she is different from humans in three aspects: the clone's origin or birth (the super-ego), their purpose for living (the ego), and, lastly, their death (the reality principle). Kathy discovers that the clones were originally modeled after deviant members of society. She claims that:

> We all know it. We're modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. […] If you want to look for possible, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all came from.[11]

The effort to distinguish clones from humans significantly affects Kathy's psyche, much like the behaviors at Hailsham and the staff's disgust. These external rejections feed into Kathy's sense of inferiority. More than that, the logic used to justify her difference amplifies her fear and insecurity as a clone. Despite the psychological burden, these negative emotions compel Kathy to reject her clone identity and cling to being "human" through her personal narrative—an attempt to evade donation and eventual "completion." However, this strategy doesn't resolve her dilemma; it only intensifies her inner conflict. Kathy's yearning to affirm her humanity becomes especially evident when Chrissie, one of the older residents at the Cottages, mentions that the only way clones might delay their organ donations—and death—is by proving they can experience genuine love. Chrissie asserts:

> What they said,' Chrissie continued, 'was that if you were a boy and a girl, and you were in love with each other, really, properly in love, and if you could show it, then the people who run Hailsham, they sorted it out for you. They sorted it out so you could have a few years together before you began your donations. [12]

The researcher notices a clash between the superego and the id. Kathy's desire to deny her identity as a clone (superego) and assume her identity (id) as a human being is not only revealed through Ruth, but Kathy also implies it through Tommy. The id and superego are inconstant conflict because the id wants instant gratification regardless of the consequences; but the superego tells us that we must behave in socially acceptable ways. Thus, the ego's job is to find the middle ground. It helps satisfy the id's desires in a rational way that will not lead to feelings of guilt. According to Freud, "the ego is not master in its own house."[13]. A person who has a strong ego, which can balance the demands of the id and the superego, has a healthy personality. Freud maintained that imbalances in the system can lead to neurosis, anxiety disorders, or unhealthy behaviors. For example, a person who is dominated by their id might be narcissistic and impulsive. A person with a dominant superego might be controlled by feelings of guilt and deny themselves even socially acceptable pleasures; conversely, if the superego is weak or absent, a

person might become a psychopath. An overly dominant superego might be seen in an overly controlled individual whose rational grasp on reality is so strong that they are unaware of their emotional needs or in a neurotic who is overly defensive (overusing ego defense mechanisms). Tommy is another character who takes on the role of Kathy's double in the story. The first reason that makes this transference possible is because he has a close relationship with Kathy. With such a close relationship, Kathy may find it easy to project her feelings or desires onto Tommy. Moreover, unlike her, he has a quick temper, and this aspect of his personality allows the reader to understand how frustrated he feels about their living conditions at Hailsham. The best scene to illustrate Tommy's frustration is when he expresses his anger during the process of selecting Hailsham football teams:

> Tommy burst into thunderous bellowing, and the boys, now laughing openly, started to run off towards the South Playing Field. Tommy took a few strides after them – it was hard to say whether his instinct was to give angry chase or if he was panicked at being left behind. In any case he soon stopped and stood there, glaring after them, his face scarlet. Then he began to scream and shout, a nonsensical jumble of swear words and insults. [14]

Ishiguro finally allows Kathy to express what is inside her mind when she stops for a while:

> I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I'd see it was Tommy, and he'd wave, maybe even call. The fantasy never got beyond that – I didn't let it – and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, and then turned back to the car and drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.[15]

3. Conclusion

Kazuo Ishiguro not only explores the origins of his characters' psychological struggles but also employs literary techniques to highlight their psychological symptoms. In his three novels, the primary technique

used to convey these symptoms is the depiction of characters' personalities, which reflect the lingering impact of painful past experiences that persistently invade their thoughts, disrupt the sense of time and chronology, and create a fragmented narrative voice that reveals how unwanted past identities are suppressed or forgotten. Ishiguro crafts each novel to immerse readers in unique settings and experiences that are context-specific and unreplicable. Notably, he achieves this distinctiveness through the consistent use of literary techniques. The first-person narrative is repeatedly employed to underscore the unreliability of the characters' memories. Beyond narrative perspective, Ishiguro also utilizes psychological mechanisms such as transference, displacement, and fantasy, enabling his novels to explore a universal theme about the inner lives of individuals.

4. Abbreviation:

NLMG: Never Let Me Go

5. Conflict of Interest: "The authors declare no conflicts of interest"

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